Church Principles For Lay People

Why Men Pray

Charles Lewis Slattery

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Church Principles for Lay People

WHY MEN PRAY

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WHY MEN PRAY

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"And he went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. . . . Again, a second time he went away, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it, thy will be done. . . . And he left them again, and went away, and prayed a third time, saying again the same words."

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ALL MEN PRAY

WHY MEN PRAY

I

ALL MEN PRAY

DEFINITIONS are always dangerous, especially when they attempt to hem in the meaning of something great and vital. We cannot define the most important realities, such as God and Love and Faith: we may know them, but we can say only a little of what we know and feel. Prayer is only less hard to define than these greatest words, and no definition ought to be found satisfactory. Nevertheless, it may help a little at the start if we define Prayer roughly as Talking with the Unseen. We need not now ask whether the Unseen is to the man who prays a vague something outside himself, or whether it is the Supreme Personality, God.

In the chapters of this book I am not planning

to argue about Prayer. I shall put down in as many chapters six convictions which I have concerning it; and the reader may ask whether he has in his experience any convictions which correspond to them.

The first of these convictions is the conviction that all men pray.

I

I believe that there is such an experience as subconscious Prayer.

We do many things without knowing that we do them. The circulation of the blood was discovered by Harvey in 1616, but all the years before that the heart of man had been sending the blood coursing through the human body. Man had been doing this essential function of his life through every hour of his three score years and ten, but had not been conscious of it. In the same way, though we know that we breathe, all but the minutest part of our breathing is done unconsciously. It is only when there is some obstruction, or when we climb a hill, that we reflect about it. This is as true of the philosopher as of the little child. In a slightly

different way the science of medicine illustrates this truth: in the Franco-Prussian War physicians abandoned what they thought the useless treatment of pouring hot oil on wounds, because they were sure that the oil played no part in the healing; but, when this supposedly outworn method was given up, the percentage of deaths was so appalling that Pasteur studied the problem and discovered that while the oil as oil had been of no benefit whatever, the heat of it had saved life: it had killed the invisible living organisms which beset the wounds. For generations army surgeons had been unconsciously doing the best thing that could have been done, though they had no knowledge of bacteria, which the heat of their oil had killed.

Now think about Prayer, in the general way in which I have defined it, as Talking with the Unseen. When men complain of the weather, of hard luck, of pain, or of sorrow, one is forced to ask to what or to whom is the complaint made. Is it fate, is it nature, is it something or some one outside humanity to which or to whom humanity is subject? Job's friends urged him to curse God and die. Others are not as definite as that. There is com-

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plaining to the Unseen. It is a form of subconscious prayer in which all men at some time indulge.

Again all men have their moments of telling the Unseen their exultation, their joy. Returning health after illness and weakness gives a man this sense of general thankfulness; so also a bright day after rainy weather, the coming of spring with its warmth and greenness, or a radiantly beautiful scene, will start a man to singing to something or some one not himself. Voltaire, seeing one day the morning sun, impulsively exclaimed, "Dieu le Père, je t' adore"; and then, looking about, cautiously added a modifying sentence lest his involuntary exclamation be interpreted as a sign of faith. Walt Whitman was also subconsciously praying when he spoke of "caressing life."

A further illustration of subconscious Prayer I believe appears in the general reverence which men now have for what they call the laws of nature. They study these laws to protect their bodies and to increase their health and happiness. Superficially the process may seem only a dull materialism. But a mere scratch upon the surface reveals that men are consulting the unseen Discipline which governs

nature. Subconsciously they are praying. They are saying to some one or to something outside themselves, "Show me thy will; and I shall do it."

The deepest aspect of subconscious Prayer appears when one says, "I ought," or "I ought not," whether it be in respect of an act past or future. When a person says, "I ought not to have done what I did yesterday," or when he says, "This act which I did not do when I had the chance, I ought to have done," he is confessing his sin or shortcoming (whatever you choose to call it) to an unseen law or person that stands for absolute right. He admits by the very repentance that he was free to do what he did not do; and the confession of failure is in a valid sense a Prayer of contrition, however unconscious the man who utters the Prayer may be of its momentous import. So too when he looks forward to a possible choice in the future, and says of one alternative, "I ought," he is telling the heart of moral righteousness that he sees the vision put before him, and recognises his duty to fulfil it. He has passed the merely natural law and is consulting the moral law which may be found to be to the

natural law as the soul is to the body. This is the highest form of subconscious Prayer.

II

I believe that Prayer is instinctive in humanity.

The study of primitive races is one of the absorbing vocations of scholars. The records of travellers who have visited barbarous or savage tribes are diligently investigated. Ancient burying places bear their mute witness to certain beliefs. Every conspicuous museum is crowded with implements and objects of crude art testifying to the thoughts which must have filled the mind of primitive man. I suppose there is no question on the part of those who are entitled to be heard on this problem that Prayer was certainly instinctive in all the primitive races of which we have any knowledge.

One common form of Prayer was the exorcising of evil spirits from certain articles of food before they could safely be eaten. The ancients often had the same dread of evil spirits that we have of germs. The only difference is that what we should call sterilisation was to them always a religious function.

Prayer was an instinctive protection against the unseen malevolent spirits which, they believed, made their home in every natural object.

Another apparently universal custom has been what we know as sacrifice. Sacrifice is Prayer in the form of deeds. The Being or beings controlling men's destinies were thought to be capricious and revengeful; so that they must be appeased. Therefore primitive man offered sacrifices of something which he valued, that it might make a sweet-smelling savour, and turn away the wrath of some offended deity. At times human sacrifice was felt to be necessary. The idea of sacrifice has its very noble aspect when it becomes spiritual, and denotes self-surrender; but it also has its ghastly and dreadful aspect. In either case it is an eloquent form of Prayer,— Prayer translated into action.

We read of the more normal instinct of what we would call ordinary Prayer in the chronicles of our North American Indians, as they first came in contact with Europeans. Very impressive it was at a parley to see the gaunt Indian chief stride out into the open space, and, lifting his hands to heaven, utter his simple and childlike prayer to the Great Spirit.

It is the illustration of what one may expect of man still in the state of barbarism.

III

In spite of such reasons as I have now given I am quite sure that some one will say that nevertheless he knows individuals who, so far as he can see, never pray.

The first warning to one who hints at exceptions, is that we must beware of depending upon conventional signs of Prayer. Because a man never has been seen at church, never has knelt, never has folded his hands, never has closed his eyes with reverent intention, never has framed a collection of sentences which could be called a Prayer, do not therefore assume that he has never prayed. Prayer is so secret and intimate that a man may pray without giving any sign of it to any other human being. Sometimes, as I have said, he may be praying subconsciously; so that not even he himself is able to give a name to the interior reality of an act upon which his soul is relying.

There is one sort of experience which I am quite sure makes every man pray: that is the experience

of sudden distress. This distress may be sudden fright in the presence of personal danger. I once asked an Oriental, who had been nominally a Buddhist, if through his childhood and youth he had ever prayed before an image of Buddha. He said that he could remember only once, that in a severe thunderstorm (of which he was pitifully afraid) he had run into a temple and prostrated himself, praying with all his soul for safety. He afterwards became a notable Christian leader. It seems as if that sudden ability to pray was the breaking through from subconsciousness to consciousness of a habit submerged in his life.

The sudden distress for most people is more apt to be actual physical pain, when a man is aware that humanity is not sufficient to relieve its own misery, however wise and kind the attending physician may be. There is also the cry of the soul in the presence of grave danger which hangs over one who is greatly loved,— one's child for example. Innumerable biographies bear witness that at such a time God seems very close, and the father, who may have thought himself somewhat hardened religiously, throws himself upon the divine protection and begs

for his beloved. These intense moments which come at least once to every person, and to most people more than once, are the breaking down of human self-sufficiency. The instinct within man comes to the surface, and man suddenly prays. In a moment, by an appeal to his science or his philosophy, he may have stifled the cry. But already, I am sure, the cry, has escaped his heart.

> "There is no God, the wicked saith,
> And truly it's a blessing;
> For what He might have done with us
> It's better only guessing. . . .
>
> "But . . . almost every one when age,
> Disease, or sorrows strike him,
> Inclines to think there is a God,—
> Or something very like Him."

The other experience which suddenly elicits prayer is unexpected relief. The joy is so overwhelming that the heights tower above and the depths yawn below. And life becomes instantly so mysterious and vast that one must cry out in thanksgiving to the Greatness of Life which stretches out to the infinities. It is as if we had just discovered that the sky is not a huge dome, only a little larger than St. Peter's, but is the mist which

starts our gaze towards the boundless reaches of space. With an exultant tremor we bow our heads and give thanks as in the presence of the Alpha and Omega. It may be a marvellous rescue from what we had prepared ourselves to call the blackest and most disgraceful of failures; it may be a sharp turn from the torment of blinding pain to thorough comfort; it may be the news that one we thought dying is surely getting well. Once more the instinct,— however deeply buried in a man's life,— rises in triumph, and the man prays that highest of Prayers, a thanksgiving. He talks gratefully to the Unseen.

IV

I have thus put down some of the reasons which convince me that all men pray. Now why is Prayer inherent in human nature? Once more I shall try not to argue, but simply recount my conviction.

When the traveller sails across the Atlantic and comes to the Azores, he feels the isolation of these tiny islands in the wide expanse of waters. They seem lonely individuals, bereft of all kinship with

the great continents and with the other islands of the sea. But when we pause to think, we know that they are not isolated. They are but the tips of high mountains whose bases reach down to the bed of the ocean. Through this common base they are united to one another; and then, as one imagines the hills and valleys and plains of the ocean bed, they are discovered through this same base to be joined to the continents and to the islands everywhere. The sea which washes the sides of the mountains is the flood of subconsciousness which makes the islands forget their real nature. But they are inseparably knit through the bed of the ocean to all the lands on which men dwell.

This is a parable of human life. We, as individuals, are like the Azores. We are apt to believe ourselves self-sufficient: we *seem,* at least, to be separated from all above, below, and around us. But the experience of the race has revealed that we are not isolated. Like islands in the sea there is much of our nature which reaches down through the deep waters of subconsciousness till it rests upon the solid foundation of all life, the Life which binds us to one another and to itself. It is

this community of life with this firm foundation of existence which gives to every normal man, who does not put a check upon his instinct, the inclination to talk with the Unseen, to pray. He is reaching down through the depths to the ground and support of all his being. As a child who holds a shell to his ear hears the splashing of the waves and the roar of the tides, so man, becoming silent, listens. And he hears, through the spaces of subconsciousness, the Voice of the Unseen.

Such thoughts as these bring one to a renewed sense of what St. Paul must have meant when he said, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God;" or when he said again, "Your life is hid . . . in God."

If this is true, how can men help praying?

PRAYER DISCOVERS GOD

II

PRAYER DISCOVERS GOD

THE second conviction which I venture to put down in this book is that Prayer discovers God. In a general way it seems to me inevitable that when all men pray and when they become conscious of their Prayer they find themselves standing face to face with One whom in a flash they recognise as God. The vision may fade, or it may become a permanent inspiration; but once at least, in every life, I think there shall have been this supreme consciousness that the man has spoken with God, and that God has disclosed Himself to the man who prayed.

I

First, think of men who through Prayer find God, when they scarcely believe that He exists,— men who find God as for the first time.

One who enters a bitter experience often finds oneself so overwhelmed that one despairs of any help. Certainly nothing known in the past is sufficient for this crushing blow. In wild desperation the soul cries out for deliverance, for at least an explanation, for some syllable of comfort. Literature is filled with these pathetic and eloquent cries from utter despair. And all the deeper records tell that through this cry of anguish God comes to pity, to bind up the wound, to console.

> "Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord:
> Lord, hear my voice. . . .
> I look for the Lord; my soul doth wait for him:
> In his word is my trust.
> My soul fleeth unto the Lord:
> Before the morning watch, I say, before the morning watch."

Over and over this ancient Psalm has been echoed in the burdened hearts of the generations, year by year gaining a new meaning because fused with the new griefs which have come to human experience. And only recently a philosopher has said that God is so wonderful in His response to the cry from the depths that He is often defined for the plain man as the God who answers from the deep.

Man in great trouble is astonished that he can cry out; he is more astonished that in the very cry of his heart he discovers God.

Another way in which Prayer suddenly discovers God is by an enforced silence, coming into a life which has hitherto been crowded with noisy activity. A good many people dread silence. They long to fill life so full of events that there will be no time to reflect upon ultimate realities. For the most part they succeed perhaps. But to every man there comes sooner or later the time, when for one cause or another, he must fold his hands and be still. Then he hears sounds so delicate and varied that he could not hear them but for the silence. Under ancient Shechem there is a subterranean stream. In the daytime, when the busy streets are filled with the cries of noisy hucksters, of gossiping women, and of romping children, one would never suspect the presence of the waters beneath the town. But in the night, when all the citizens are asleep, the chance wayfarer hears in these same streets the flowing and splashing of the river through its hidden rocky course. So it is that when a man, accustomed to noise, becomes silent in a silent environment, he

hears the flow of that great River of God which has always been coursing through human life everywhere, but has been unheard because of the clamour of men. A boy from the crowded tenements of a modern city finds the silence of the first night in a country camp almost unbearable in its horror: he is frightened because he cannot hear the ceaseless rattle of the city: never before has he known the reality of stillness. But within a fortnight, under careful and sympathetic guidance, he has discovered a meaning in the silence of nature which sends him back to the town with a new light in his eyes. This light is more than the impetus of health. He too has discovered God in the stillness.

A third way in which men discover God suddenly through Prayer appears in the impulse of abandonment. A person may have been self-willed, self-dependent; and all may have gone serenely with him for years. His very masterfulness may have carried him through many a crisis, over many a steep road of difficulty. And then comes a day when he cannot meet the crisis; his strength is not sufficient for the sheer ascent before him. All becomes black. He is lost. And then he who perhaps has never con-

sciously prayed throws himself, in an abandonment of all pride and of all human strength, at the feet of God. And God hears him and saves him. Every Rescue Mission can give instances of just this sort. Every clergyman who is sought by people "caught out in guilt in first confusion," could, were he free to do so, multiply examples. When the proud man bows his head and pours out his woe, giving himself without reservation to God, God enters his soul and becomes his strength. It is the abandonment of all earthly support which lets a man on the edge of the precipice, holding tightly to the frail twig called self-direction, let go. He shuts his eyes, prepared for a fall into the depths of the abyss; but the abyss is closed by the protection of God, and in the cry of his soul he enters into the divine safety.

Such is the experience of men who feel God as for the first time. Groping in Prayer through the dark, they push open a door and see the Everlasting Light. By Prayer they discover God.

II

Think now of the discovery which they make through Prayer who assume that they know God so well that they do not need to ask Him anything. Very startling sometimes are their discoveries.

All through history there have been men (like the Pharisees of whom our Saviour spoke) who have said, "My will be done," and have fancied that they were praying. There are charitable people who give in their own way, and forget altogether the ill-paid workmen in their factories. There are people whose nation is at war with other nations, who dictate to God that He shall be the God of their nation only, and so bestow upon it the victory, and bring all others to defeat. There are people who assume that they know God in so complete a way that, if any neighbour disagree with their definitions, he must be cast out as worse than a heathen man and a publican. All these people tacitly imply that they own God, and for their convenience and prosperity He will act upon what they call their Prayers, which are in truth nothing more than their dictations. To every one of them

must come at last a rude awakening. While on their knees some night they will catch themselves saying, "My will be done;" they will correct themselves, and say "Thy will be done;" and then they will see God in His majesty, not their slave as they had thought in their impudence, but their Master. What will He have done with their self-complacent benevolence (builded on whited sepulchres), with their tribal idea of God (hopelessly ante- and anti-Christian), with their selfish circumscribing of truth about God (as if God never spoke to any others of His children)? Will it not be dissipated in thin air, disclosing the solid fact of the Omnipotent and All-wise Lord? The self-congratulations of the Pharisee will be exchanged for the Prayer of the Publican. To their chagrin they will find that they have been calling something God which was not God; in humility, in despair which is the beginning of hope, they will as little children kneel to be taught the will of God. They will no longer be giving orders, as it were, how the world shall be governed, but they will be saying plainly such words as these, "If it be Thy will, O God, take away all my possessions so that I have

nothing either to save or to give; if it be Thy will, O God, give victory to the enemies of my fatherland; if it be Thy will, O God, prove all my declarations about Thy nature and attributes to be false." Then will God appear, tender and strong, to guide His child into the way of Truth, discovering Himself to a genuine and penitent Prayer.

Other people who have assumed that they knew God, are not too confident, but not confident enough. They feel so sure of what God can and cannot do that they set off certain places in life where they declare that He cannot help. For instance, when a great bereavement comes, they are apt to say that sorrow and death are inevitable in the nature of things: the best they can do is to pick up a copy of Marcus Aurelius and try to learn Stoic submission to the necessity of the natural order; there is no use of praying. But at such times, whatever one's philosophy, one must pray. And what does Prayer do? It cannot and does not give back the dead to this life. It does not take away pain. But the heroism of Marcus Aurelius is exchanged for the comfort of the Fourth Gospel. It is no longer, "Be content: t s one of the things which nature

wills;" but rather, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God . . ." I remember that once a father who had lost his little child, and who I supposed would be utterly crushed, wrote of his sorrow and then added, "I never loved God as I do to-day." He was amazed to discover God even in this grief,—and to find Him quite different from what he had supposed, not so much his Creator and Lord as his most loving Father and Friend, One to be loved with the same love with which he had loved his child. When men despair of help, and yet nevertheless turn to Prayer, they discover that "underneath are the everlasting arms." They always have discovered this; they always will discover it. Once more men who think they know Him discover Him more truly.

As a corollary to this discovery we may add that in such experiences as I have mentioned, men discover the stern quality of God's love for us. We in the glad sunshine of life talk glibly of the love of God as the indulgence of a careless father. But when we endure pain or bereavement or failure, we look up to see in these calamities not God's wrath or punishment, but His love. Because through

Prayer our love goes out to Him, we know that our love is only the response to His love, first given to us. Whereupon we learn that God is not loving our ease or our mere temporary happiness; he is loving our endurance, our courage, our patience, our growing strength. He is loving our immortal spirits, which with the kind cruelty of a loving physician of souls, he is tempering in the hot fires of adversity and pain, that they may be equal to His eternal friendship. "Our God is a consuming fire," wrote a saint in the first century; but he said on the same page, "God dealeth with you, as with sons." We discover that God's love is the love of the good earthly father who cares; only God cares infinitely. And in our adversity, our trim and neat theology of the past drops away, and we see in ways which we cannot describe who God is, as we never have known before.

III

Prayer discovers God to those who have not quite dared to believe that there is a God; Prayer discovers God to those who have in some way confused God with something or some one other than

God, and makes them see God as He is; and now, thirdly, Prayer admits those who have begun to know God to the endless surprises of a growing intimacy.

The Old Testament gives us the impressive example of Elijah. Elijah was a man of God. He was conscious of His presence. But in his strenuous career Elijah had grown to expect to find God only in some mighty manifestation. It was quite reasonable to Elijah's mind that God should send burning drought or refreshing rains, or that He should send fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice in the presence of the prophets of Baal. But when Elijah felt that his mission had failed, when he thought that he only was left in Israel to worship the Lord, he did not see any chance that God could comfort him. He waited in the door of his cave for some signal of God's reassertion of power. The loud sounds of nature crashed about him,— but God was not in any of them, he felt. Then came the still small voice,— and God whispered to him the assurance that there were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Even the loyal man of God found constant surprises in his

knowledge of God as the days of experience passed.

The crowning example of this truth is seen in the Prayer of Christ the night before His crucifixion. In the Garden of Gethsemane our Master, as He faced the vision of the Cross, prayed, "Father, let this cup pass from me." Then He added, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." We can speak of such a scene only with the utmost reticence, but it has always seemed to me that, between those two Prayers, there was even to the Perfect Son a new knowledge of the Father. Love a moment before seemed,— if one may judge by the Prayer,— to be exacting a sacrifice; then, in a moment, the sacrifice seemed to melt into the exultation of the Father's vision for His Son's immortal service to the world. It was a new task,— one never before even dreamed of,— the task of life through death, of victory through defeat. And God revealed a new phase of His love. "Ye shall leave me alone," Christ had said to His friends that night; "and yet I am not alone,— the Father is with me." I cannot help thinking that one reason for His incessant praying to the Father throughout His earthly life was the deeper and deeper knowledge of God

which He thus brought into His spotless humanity. Even He trembled as He entered into the endless mystery of it; but He saw and was glad. What was said of Him as a child,—" Jesus increased in wisdom . . . , and in favour with God,"— must have been true of Him always. We are learning the paradox that within perfection there is growth; the Divine Perfection is always " from glory unto glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord."

To us, as disciples of Jesus Christ, the most bewildering surprise is the knowledge of the Father which we receive through the Son. Many years ago a shy college student looked up with reverence to a certain inspiring teacher. He felt that he knew this distinguished teacher through his lectures, and through the chance exchanges of a recitation; but he had never ventured to call upon him: he had never talked with him in a personal and intimate way. It had really never occurred to him that he could do so; for the great teacher was occupied with his reading, his teaching, and his writing,— and probably he did not know one of his pupils from another. So the months passed till one day a friend of both told the young man that he was speaking of him to

the learned teacher incidentally, and suddenly the master had exclaimed, "I love that young fellow!" It was to the younger man a revelation: he knew that he was known and separated from the mass of pupils who through the years had been going in and out of a certain lecture room. He ventured, even yet somewhat timidly, to go to see the teacher in his study; and out of it sprang a friendship which can never end,— a friendship which might not have been if the friend whom both had in common had not spoken his word of incidental testimony. The mission of Jesus Christ is similar: He makes known to men how much God cares. And God is waiting even as that master of youth for the approach of those whom He loves. He too loves and waits. He will not thrust Himself on men; He respects our personality. But when we know that He cares for us one by one, when we recover from our amazement that it can be so, when through Christ we are convinced of it beyond all peradventure, then we dare to pray as we never prayed before. We no longer approach Him in formal utterance only; but we talk with Him, as a man speaks with his friend, and we are conscious of a

new and wonderful experience,— we enter by a glad surprise into His intimacy, "through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Thus by prayer we discover God. We discover that He is. We discover that He hears us. We discover that He rules. We discover that He loves us. And through all and in all we discover that by hardship and joy He means to give us life — and the victory.

PRAYER UNITES MEN

III

PRAYER UNITES MEN

I

THERE is an old story of two travellers who came at nightfall to a rough frontiersman's cabin. Two wild-looking men occupied the two rooms, but they bade the strangers eat with them, and then gave them one of the rooms for the night. In spite of the open hospitality, the guests were afraid of their hosts, and so agreed with one another that each through a chink in the wall should watch while the other slept, lest some murderous surprise be sprung upon them. Finally the watcher saw the two unkempt pioneers take down a Bible, read in it, and then drop on their knees for a Prayer. Soon every one under that poor roof was asleep. There was no need to watch longer: the strangers knew now that they were safe. The sight of men at Prayer had given them assurance of unity.

Another familiar record emphasises the same truth. In one of his books Henry Drummond tells of a scene on an ocean steamer when, one Sunday night, a man spoke of a hymn which had just been sung as having for him peculiarly sacred associations. He was in the Confederate Army in the American Civil War, and was one night ordered to lonely sentry duty. As the night wore on, he felt his danger, and to keep up his courage he began to sing,

> "Jesus, Lover of my soul . . . ";

and after uttering the great Prayer of this hymn, he was comforted, and felt quite safe. A strange expression came over the face of a fellow-passenger on the ship: "I," he said, "was in the Union Army that night, and had been sent out with a party of scouts. We saw a solitary sentry, and my men had their rifles levelled to fire; but just then we heard the clear notes ringing out in the stillness,

> "Cover my defenceless head
> With the shadow of Thy wing;"

and I said, 'Boys, lower your rifles; we'll go home.'" The Prayer had brought to the enemy a sense of unity which it was impossible to break.

These stories are perhaps too well known to repeat; but they exactly illustrate a conviction which must come to every one who observes, either in himself or in others, genuine Prayer. We think that every one would instinctively have done what the travellers did in the frontiersman's cabin, what the officer did on the sentry line. When we hear a stranger praying we recognise at once that he is praying to the God to whom we pray; that is, to our God; and thus we have a sense of fellowship which nothing else can give. We feel that in Prayer we are one family. Prayer unites men.

II

Herein we discern the essential value of public or common Prayer. When we really pray together we are lost in God; and in God we find one another.

In communions of the Church wherein it is customary to have, as part of the service, a general confession of sins said by all the people, the criticism is sometimes made that such a form tends to unreality. This abject acknowledgment of wrongdoing and omission, says the critic, does not tally with sober facts, when the words are uttered by,

let us say, a quiet and pious woman who spends every moment, so far as she can, in saying kind words and in doing thoughtful and loving acts.

Two suggestions may be made in regard to this criticism. The first is that all through history the saints have been, to the minds of their careless relatives and friends, unduly and provokingly conscious of sinfulness in their own noble lives. Words and deeds which would never trouble the fairly good and quite respectable person of the world, evidently lie heavy on the consciences of these holy people. When they kneel among the worldlings and the careless, and say their confessions of shortcomings, they evidently are saying real words,— words which express sufficiently clearly their attitude of forlorn and hopeful penitence.

The other necessary suggestion, however, strikes deeper. Even were we to suppose that the mature and well-controlled Christian were so nearly perfect that the words of a general confession could have no application to him individually, there still is high reason why the saint should kneel with the stained and battered beings who are all about him, and say with them, "We have erred and strayed. . . ."

We cannot say "*Our* Father," without becoming conscious that no man lives to himself. The very act of Prayer makes us members one of another. When the saint kneels with the sinners (that is, people who are so much more sinful than he that for the moment we may put them in a different class), he is acknowledging his responsibility for the wrong-doing of the race of which he is an inseparable member and part. If a poor degraded being should hear beside him the voice of a pure and noble woman, saying, "We have done those things which we ought not to have done," and should he have left in him wit and sense enough to appreciate what it means to have such a radiant being feel responsible that such a man as he is what he is, then what a thrill of hope must flash through the murky spaces of his soul!

The complete answer to the quibble that the good cannot honestly confess in public such sins as they never did, but which possibly their neighbours have done, is the example of our Lord Christ. When the conscience-stricken, begrimed, and draggled souls of Palestine came down to the Jordan to be baptised by John, with the symbolic expecta-

tion that as the current of the river washed the dust from their bodies, so God would wash away the sins from their spirits, then Jesus of Nazareth also came and asked for baptism. John drew back as from a sacrilegious act. I think it was no mere theological concept which deterred him: one look into the Saviour's face must have made John aware how thoroughly different He was from all these sorry people who had been flocking down from Jerusalem. John's was a baptism of repentance; this Man, John thought, had nothing to repent. Because Christ urged him, he led the Perfect Man down into the cleansing waters of the Jordan; but it must have been a blind obedience. Not till the Cross had altogether proclaimed the unity of Christ with the race, could any one have understood why such a Being should seek to identify His sinlessness with the sin of other people. It was for Him what our general confessions are for us to-day,— only that we follow afar off, and only with dim consciousness of the truth implied in our act and word. Jesus Christ was kneeling in a world of error to confess the sin of the world, and to take into His whiteness the blackness of men's evil: He would

not and did not flinch from it; He would acknowledge Himself an inseparable part of humanity; He would say, "I am responsible." In the remembrance of such an example no Christian man, really awake, can think it inconsistent or strange that bad people and good should kneel, all of them together, and beseech God to forgive them. It is the unity of Prayer.

Public Prayer necessarily includes petition. As people pray together, the imagination is quickened: it becomes impossible for individuals to pray for selfish aggrandisement (in whatever disguise), and so to forget the needs and desires of their neighbours. The city merchant on his holiday in the country naturally wishes to have uninterrupted sunshine, while the farmer, hard by the merchant's country inn, longs for days of rain, lest his crops burn up in the summer heat. When these two men meet in the village church on Sunday morning, the private Prayers which each in his heart has been praying for his especial kind of weather are merged into a higher Prayer which unites the needs of men into an unselfish harmony. So far as weather is concerned, they ask that humanity may be able to

use what is given in such a way that, whether it make life easier or more difficult, it will make life better: it falls into place in the great Prayer that "among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found." In times of war, in so far as men feel that they are all, small and great, standing before God, it is hard to think of the people of any one nation, in so far as they really pray, praying unqualifiedly for the victory of their national arms. They may pray for the triumph of righteousness, truth, and freedom in the earth, and they may hope that the government guiding their nation is just, honest, and democratic, but they cannot ask God to bless what may be despicable, simply because it is shielded by their country's banner. The loftiest Prayer at such a critical moment will be that the Holy Spirit may keep one's nation from all selfishness and compromise and guide it to the choice that is right, and so, whatever happens, make it a true servant to mankind. Even in war, Prayer brings humanity together.

Public Prayer also embraces the giving of thanks. In some parishes it is the habit for the people to

say together a general thanksgiving. A young college student, homesick, discouraged, somewhat doubtful about the value of life, chanced on a Sunday morning, many years ago, to be in a great church where this custom prevailed. When he heard all the people about him joining audibly in a form of thanksgiving for God's creation and preservation of them, something like an electric current passed through him. The thankfulness of the congregation of which he happened to be a part caught hold of him individually, and bore him on irresistibly into its hope and joy. The dignity of the church, the sermon by the inspiring preacher, doubtless made their impression, but the remembrance of the thanksgiving made the day a turning-point in his life. In these times when it is not uncommon to meet people who, in serious moments, will tell you that they are not glad that they are alive, who say that they wish that they had never been born; when, further, it is not uncommon to read of suicides, showing that many are so weary of life that they cannot await God's time for dismissal from this stage of it, it is good that in some way the unhappy individual should be made to feel his

unity with a thankful humanity. Once more in the Prayer of thanksgiving we find that Prayer unites men.

There is a form of thanksgiving which is higher than words: it is an act,— the grateful commemoration of the Lord's Last Supper. One of the names of the Sacrament in the early Church was the word, Eucharist, or Thanksgiving, derived from the thanksgivings which Christ pronounced over the bread and the cup on the night before His crucifixion. All down the Christian centuries people have been, through this act of remembrance, giving thanks for the Love of God, declared in the life and death of Christ. Another name for the Sacrament has been the Holy Communion: this word lays emphasis upon its inherent power to bind those who partake of the "Thanksgiving" not only to the Lord but also to one another. It is the Sacrament of Unity. We do not steal away, apart from men, to thank God for the supremest manifestation of His love for us; but we call together as many as possible, even out of the byways and hedges, that they may come with us, and, that the Feast may be furnished with guests. We kneel to receive bread from the

same loaf, and to drink wine from the same chalice. We are so close one to another that all distinctions fall away. The wisest and most learned may not know the whole significance of this way of giving thanks, but the humblest and most ignorant can understand what it is to obey a loving voice which said, "Do this in remembrance of me." The command comes, "Lift up your hearts;" and the response is not given, as it were, one by one, "I lift up my heart," but it is an act of unity,—"*We* lift them up unto the Lord." The strong are giving their hope to the trembling; and the fearful are catching hold of the courage of the strong, that all together may rise from sorrow and despair, and give thanks unto God for His unspeakable goodness. The ideal of the Holy Communion is attained, not when a few congenial spirits come together to enjoy the quiet approach to the Mystery of Godliness, which then seems especially for them; the ideal is rather attained when all sorts of people draw near with faith, and forget their own petty selves in remembering one another in love and in being lost, with them, in the contemplation of a Saviour who owns them all.

III

The unity of Prayer extends I believe beyond the limits of this life. If you stand at the door of a city church on a crowded thoroughfare, and watch the people who go in, you will discover that now and then a man enters apparently not to pray, but to peer curiously into an unknown place. He glances at the notice boards, then at the open door, and, as by a mere whim, he enters. But as he crosses the threshold and looks into the empty church, an expression comes upon his face which shows the awe of surprise. The contrast with the noise and confusion of the street, the peace and beauty, may explain his look, in part. It may impress him to see here or there a kneeling figure. But what pulls at his heartstrings is the sense that this is a place of worship. The place seems to be filled with worshippers even when it is physically empty. If the man has imagination he begins to think of all the good men and women who have in the past loved this spot and have looked to it as the place where their souls were most conscious of God's presence. Dead they may have been for many years, but in some way the

old church seems still to be filled with their lives. If this chance visitor comes to a service afterwards and hears floating over the kneeling congregation the words, "Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name," he begins to feel that representatives of that heavenly company are there among the people whom he sees. In the act of Prayer, the unseen are united to those who are seen. Prayer makes them one again. One is reminded of Westcott, the great Bishop of Durham, who often went into the dark and silent cathedral at night, remembering, as he sat or knelt, all the saints who had worshipped there through the long history of Durham, and feeling that they were there with him, in the spot which both they and he loved best of all earthly places. It is both an emotion and a reason which compels us to find in Prayer a unity which joins those who pray, however long ago the river of death flowed between.

Nor is the instinct confined to the more majestic forms of public Prayer. Prayer in lonely places, and one by one, is a door through which the bereaved come in contact with those who have van-

ished from this world. This experience was never more vividly portrayed than in Rossetti's *Blessed Damosel.*

> "'I wish that he were come to me,
> For he will come,' she said.
> Have I not prayed in heaven? — on earth,
> Lord, Lord, has he not prayed?
> Are not two prayers a perfect strength?
> And shall I feel afraid?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "We two will stand beside that shrine,
> Occult, withheld, untrod,
> Whose lamps are stirred continually
> With prayer sent up to God;
> And see our old prayers granted, melt
> Each like a little cloud."

The philosophy of the experience is simple. By Prayer we are lost in the life of God; and all who live in God, wherever they may be, are near us as we pray; for they and we are together in Him.

As I write these words there lies on my desk a letter from one who has just entered upon the great separation of life. The letter throbs with the agony, but there is this sentence which looks towards the light,—"Prayer is my only help." Yes, Prayer brings again the unity, which only seems to be broken.

GOD DEPENDS ON MEN'S PRAYER

IV

GOD DEPENDS ON MEN'S PRAYER

A CONVICTION, presuming as it may seem, becomes to my thinking more and more necessary; namely, that God depends on men's Prayer.

How dare we say what God does or why He does it? Have we any right to speak of the Life or Character of our Maker? Is it reverent to assume that He wishes His creatures to be or to do anything in particular? Is it not best simply to bow our heads in the presence of His Infinite Mystery, and be silent?

Questions like these have received in human experience two solid answers. First, God certainly reveals Himself. We cannot gaze at the stars by night or the wayside flower by day without seeing,— once assuming that these things have a Maker,— a good deal about this Maker's manner of action.

When we study the course of history, moreover, we also see,— again once assuming that history has a Lord,— much that is informing about His dealing with men. Then too there are the intimate moments when friend talks with friend: when the depths of humanity are sounded in such frank moments, it is clear that through friendship a Higher Personality speaks than can be accounted for by the two human beings who confer. Finally, all that is best in humanity for centuries has found either its incentive or its satisfaction from the knowledge of God which has come to men through Jesus Christ. There might be found excellent men who would dispute one or more of these assertions; but I cannot think of any man who believes in God's existence at all who does not find, in some of them, ample reason for believing that God reveals Himself.

The other answer to the questions which the querulous put to him who attempts to speak of God's behaviour and purposes, is somewhat more subtle. It cannot be put into a proposition and argued, but it is hid within the fastnesses of the human heart. Every man, I believe, who thinks

much about God comes sooner or later to the conclusion that God wishes to be known. Else, one asks, why should there be these manifold revelations of God's nature and will? Why should there be this instinctive wish in the saints to try to please God,— how can they think of pleasing Him unless they feel that it is possible to discover what He desires? Above all, there is the persistent assurance that He cares. If He is so far from indifferent to His creatures that He wants their service, then He must long to let them know what things shall please Him. The most appealing Prayers of the ages which have come down to us all assume that God as our Father wishes us to know Him.

It cannot therefore reasonably be said that it is presumptuous to think that God depends on men's Prayer,— provided there is sufficient warrant in history or present experience to declare it.

I

I believe that we know enough about God to assert that He loves us so much that He wills to do for us certain things. These purposes are only gradually unfolded as we are able to understand

them. He is the Union of Love and Power: He will and He can. But in order that the beneficent ends should be accomplished in us, we must receive them. The divine plan halts unless frail humanity will deign to accept what a loving God bestows.

Now Prayer is the medium through which God's gracious Will for us takes effect. Prayer is as the atmosphere in which God's sunshine can give its light and its warmth. Prayer is as the wire or as the ether in which the current of electricity can run its course. Directly we see how far Prayer is from mere asking. It may have any form of words or no words; it may make definite requests or simply ask God to do what will be best; but, whatever the means, the essence of Prayer is that it be the opening of our lives to God. The Quakers seized upon a vital truth when they insisted upon sitting down in the silence, with the expectation that, if they waited long enough and in a sufficiently receptive mood, they would receive something from the Holy Spirit.

The life of our Saviour displays this truth in the most concrete way possible. No one can look back upon His time in Palestine without reflecting upon

the opportunity which men and women then had to become His friends. There were delightful people, like Nicodemus and Gamaliel, who seem to have had every quality but one to enter into His friendship,—they were gentle, considerate, cultivated, learned, but they were not receptive. And the gift of Christ's friendship, the gift of God's love incarnate, though lying at their very feet, could not be theirs. Whereas there were other people of a quite different sort, having little outwardly to attract, being naturally rough and crude, with little training of any kind, who seem to have little that was equal to the high comradeship of Jesus of Nazareth, and who yet entered into that friendship, and became, because of it, more than saints and kings — the St. Peters, the St. Johns, the St. Andrews of all subsequent history, the leaders of the world. Whatever else they lacked they had the one indispensable qualification: they were willing to listen, they were willing to learn,— they were, in a word, receptive. That they recognised Prayer as the sign and symbol of this receptiveness, we know; for they said to Christ, "Lord, teach us to pray."

First, then, God depends on men's Prayer, be-

cause Prayer is the medium through which God bestows upon men what God desires to give them. Thus Prayer is the means of satisfying the love which God has for us.

II

The second thought, in this connection, is that Prayer makes a difference in the course of events: Prayer does change the world.

A comment not infrequently made about Prayer is that God has His own plans for the universe, and has set it into a framework of the most relentless laws. Why should insignificant beings think that by their pleadings they can change the purpose of this almighty Lord? If He is all-wise, to yield to a change in His purpose would be to diminish the wisdom of it. If He is all-loving, to yield to a change would be to do for men something less than the most loving act possible. Arguments like these are sparks struck off the anvil of a fierce determinism. They have so much truth in their logic that only the blunt facts of human experience can correct the error, and preserve the truth which lies embedded in them.

One of these facts of human experience is the conviction of man that he is free. Why is a man remorseful about his bad investments, his injudicious speeches, his giving secrets to a friend who has been unable to keep them, unless he is quite sure that he might have made good investments instead of bad, that he might have said exactly the right word instead of the words which brewed trouble, that he might have maintained a golden silence even in the presence of him whom he most trusted? Such simple instances are the clearest evidence that a man believes himself free. There are fatalists in philosophy — whether the philosophy is of the schools or of the country grocer's shop at the four corners — but there are no fatalists in the red-blooded activity of everyday life. We rejoice in our victories and we mourn over our defeats. The victories are real because they might have been defeats; and the defeats are real because they might have been victories. Laughter and tears mean something.

Has God then no plan for the universe? Does He leave the ends loose that human wills may fray them or tie them together at pleasure? No man

who has looked up into the night filled with its shining worlds, all swinging through the skies in perfect rhythm, can doubt that the oversight over all created things extends from the archangels to the insects, from the greatest sun down to the invisible electron. But there is an order more significant than the outward and physical order. There is an order of the spirit. The oversight of God covers all departments of life, material and spiritual; only in all departments He evidently seeks and receives co-operation. There is a response from His world. It is a world of risk. Everywhere there is chance for failure and for success. His plan for the material and the spiritual in life sweeps on through time; but there is sometimes a slowness or an acceleration, wherein freedom takes its part.

The truth is that man, by his freedom, both can and does snarl the beautiful machinery of God, and from time to time man also finds his place in it, tries to understand, does in a measure understand, and intelligently and willingly gives himself up to do God's will. The permission to entangle God's plan issues in license. The permission to accept God's plan issues in freedom. "If the Son," said

Christ, "shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." There is thus a freedom within freedom. There is a freedom of double permission which makes way for the freedom of the supreme possibility. He only is truly free who so far enters into the plan of God and receives its power into his will that all friction is done away, and like a little wheel in an enormous engine he does his part with approximate perfection because he is joyfully trying to do what the whole plan is devised to accomplish.

We see in history how humanity may clog or advance the divine purpose. The prophets of the Old Testament were men who saw as from high mountains the meaning of the world. They tried to communicate their vision to the people. They did not seek an exclusive function, but longed that all the people should see what they saw: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets!" was the cry of one of them. When kings and people would not see, and failing to see would not do, God's will, they set back not only their own individual happiness and honour, they also held back the triumph of Jerusalem. But of the final triumph of Jerusalem

they had no doubt. The redeemed should come with singing to do God's will, and Jerusalem should be rebuilt; if not on earth, then on the clouds of heaven.

Why God should have allowed His perfect plans to be hindered by man's chance to co-operate or not to co-operate we need not ask at this moment. It is sufficient to acknowledge that by a fundamental instinct in man there is a conviction that man, by however slight a degree, can thwart temporarily the loving plan of God. If this is understood one must believe that God must indeed desire man to co-operate with Him, by seeing His will, and then by receiving it. This process is summed up in the cry, "Thy will be done." And that is Prayer, the deepest, most real Prayer. Therefore we say that as God would see His purpose fulfilled, having made the world in such a way that He has bestowed a share in its progress, He does depend upon men's Prayer, because Prayer is man's effort to cease being a hindrance and to become a perfectly adjusted and frictionless part in the harmony of God's eternal will for all creation.

III

Another way in which God depends on man's Prayer, I think, is by looking to individual people to allow Him to do through them new things for the world. The doctrine of evolution has taught us that God's creation is continuous. If we had eyes to see, the universe is each moment revealing new wonders: time is crowded with God's endless adventure. And the most astonishing creations are, I believe, done through men, who, in Prayer, make themselves the narrow path on which the feet of God press on to do His fresh acts of lovingkindness.

There is a respected adage of psychology that we can will to do only what we have already done or what we have seen another do. Excellent reasons are marshalled to prove this declaration. But in all the argument one exception is overlooked. When a man prays with all his might and with complete abandonment, saying "Thy will be done" as if he really meant it, he is inviting God to inspire him with energy and courage to follow, perhaps,

some gleam from heaven which shall lead into a country into which no human being has yet penetrated. Through Prayer, when it is sufficiently earnest, man can will to do an act which he has never done before, which he has never seen another do, which he has never imagined could be done,—provided, as the man prays, God send him forth to do it.

Here again the example of Jesus Christ looms before us. When, on the night before His death, He prayed, "Nevertheless thy will be done," He was asking the Father to put Him to a task which had never been seen or imagined by any human spirit. By yielding to the cruelty of blind or unscrupulous men, by yielding to the most shameful torture, He was to show God the victory of human love, and He was to show man the utmost pinnacle of God's love. When Jesus Christ arose to be betrayed and to be led down the hill, across the brook, into the city, He had caught from the Father the Father's will; and it was His own will, won through Prayer, to take His humanity into the undiscovered land of a complete loyalty and a complete sacrifice. He willed to do a new thing; and over all we seem to hear the

Voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

We who look into the Face of Christ, know how much God cares for men. We see the dignity,—undeserved as in our humility we must know it to be,—which He assigns to us. We believe that God longs to keep the springs of life fresh and sparkling, free of stagnation and monotony; and therefore we reverently imagine that He anxiously awaits our Prayer. Shall it be full and free and true? Shall we ask Him to take from us or to lay upon us what He will, awaiting only our consent? Shall we look out into distance so great, as we pray, that we cannot see even the outlines of the vision, knowing only that God has there a plan which we shall gradually begin to see, as our obedience begins to grasp His commands, instant by instant? If so, then we know that God does depend upon men's Prayer. And, resting in Him, we go out upon the quest of His infinite purpose. So great is Prayer.

IV

I have said that through Prayer we give heed to God that He may tell us how much He loves us; that is, by doing for us through our acquiescence the beautiful deeds He desires to do for us. In thinking how God depends upon our Prayer, I have a final suggestion to make: I believe that God depends on men's Prayer because through Prayer He hears the poor stumbling accents of man's love for Him.

The profound and simple philosophy of the creation of man is that God made man in order to have a wider field for His love. If you accept the Christian definition of God as Love you have no alternative to such an hypothesis. And no other hypothesis explains all the tragedies and difficulties of human experience. You wonder why men should not be guarded from sin and pain and sorrow. Why, you ask, must there be this pitiful risk and danger on every side, with every man evidently failing to a greater or less extent, and bearing the awful marks of his mistakes, perhaps through eternity? If God loves us why does He not shield us? The only answer is that God — as we see from the

sequel — wishes not only to love us, He also wishes us to love Him. And love is so hard and magnificent that it must be won through all the perils, as of a campaign in a long war. It is not won by a march down a city street on a festal day,— with banners waving and the bands playing; it is won through loneliness and agony and fear and the sweating of blood. It becomes, not the sentiment of the gay reveller, but the scarred loyalty of the blood-stained hero. Out of the depths of human experience, having been treated not like pampered infants but like men, even like God, we come up to God's throne, along the steps of Prayer, to give to Him something well-tried and hardened, something with all the ranges of emotion vibrating within it,— love,— the love of the earthly child for the heavenly Father. We know that such love has gone to God on the wings of Prayer: many is the Job who, having seemingly suffered everything that human flesh can suffer, has cried out to God, "Though thou slay me, yet will I trust thee." And the topmost note of love to God through Prayer is that last word from the Cross, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." The facts

are quite clear: men do suffer, and out of their suffering comes the most profound expression of their love to God. They speak to God quite frankly their love for Him,— and that is Prayer in one of its profoundest aspects.

Why, we may ask, should we suppose that God cares for the expression of love as well as for the love itself? As in other cases, so here, a reference to our Saviour's life helps more than anything else. In the Fourth Gospel is the record that after His resurrection Christ asked Peter three times, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" After each question, Peter declared his affection; but the third time, he was perplexed and grieved that the Lord had asked him three times, "Lovest thou me?" and he answered vehemently, "Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee!" We may imagine that this third time Peter expressed his love through his whole being; with tears falling on his cheek, and a choking voice, as well as by the words, he expressed his love for and to his Master. All sorts of intricate theological solutions have been suggested for our Lord's asking three times for a declaration of Peter's love, many of which are ex-

cellent and probably true. But the crowning solution is the simplest and most natural. Of course, we may say, Christ knew what the transparent Peter thought and felt. He knew Peter's love; He wished, we believe, simply to hear His dear friend *say* that he loved Him.

We see the same divine longing in the life of a good father or a good mother. Every normal parent longs not only for the affection of his child but also for its expression. I was reading only recently of a mother whose death seems to have been hastened because her child had a strange obsession by which he never responded to her kisses. When the child was grown to manhood he confessed that he had longed to express the love which he really felt, but something in him prevented, even though he instinctively felt how much his apparent indifference wounded the person whom he loved best. Moreover, a good parent, by a native instinct, does all in his power to cultivate the power of expression in his child. A modern poet has deftly described this trait, and applied it to the highest relationship.

> "In a fair garden
> I saw a mother playing with her child,

And, with that chance beguiled,
I could not choose but look
How she did seem to harden
His little soul to brook
Her absence — reconciled
With after boon of kisses,
And sweet irrational blisses.
For she would hide
With loveliest grace
Of seeming craft
Till he was ware of none beside
Himself upon the place; —
And then he laughed,
And then he stood a space
Disturbed, his face
Prepared for tears;
And half-acknowledged fears
Met would-be courage, balancing
His heart upon the spring
Of flight — till, waxing stout,
He gulped the doubt.
So up the pleached alley
Full swift he ran:
Whence she,
Not long delayed,
Rushed forth with joyous sally
Upon her little man.
Then was it good to see
How each to other made
A pretty rapture of discovery.

"Blest child! blest mother! blest the truth ye taught —
God seeketh us, and yet He would be sought."

This inference finds its most illuminating interpretation in St. Paul's description of God's teaching us to pray. "We know not," said St. Paul, "what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." The mother teaching her child to lisp his love for her, for his sake and for hers, is then a far-off reflection of the loving act of the Lord God, by which He teaches His earthly children to pray, and in Prayer to tell to Him the fulness of their love. He too longs to hear those whom He loves say that they love Him.

Therefore we may believe that God depends on men's Prayer,— for their sake, for the world's sake, for His own sake.

PRAYER SUBMITS TO THE BEST

V

PRAYER SUBMITS TO THE BEST

I BELIEVE that all men who pray deeply and long attain the conviction that in and through Prayer they submit to the best. Submit may seem a harsh word. It is indeed insufficient to describe the experience, but it is the word which seems most accurate and real at the beginning. When by Prayer a man has submitted his own desire to the will of God, he discovers that he has done something more than submit. What this "something more" is we shall see in the sequel.

I

Prayer begins with asking for what we want. We shall be wise if we attempt neither to bargain nor to philosophise. Like little children running to their parents with what may seem trivial requests, we tell to God the catalogue of our every need,—

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that is, as we conceive it. We do not reckon nicely how likely we are to get all the things we ask for: we are like trusting children, unafraid to utter the thoughts of our hearts.

Invariably the philosopher holds up his hands,—if he is merely a philosopher. We cannot change God, he explains. The majesty of God's plans, made from eternity, moves on; and the Prayers of men patter upon the hard surface of these plans, as the drops of rain glance from the hard roofs of a city. Why should men pray in this easy, childlike way? And then, continues the philosopher (who is a mere philosopher), such Prayers are unnecessary. If God loves us and is including us always in His loving plan, why should we attempt to dictate, by our shortsightedness, a substitute for His wise perfection? These two complaints of the philosopher are cogent. The only difficulty with them is that they leave out life,—such life as we behold when we watch loving parents listening attentively to their children's requests.

What is the life which the observant and sympathetic friend sees when he watches a parent's love brooding over a child's Prayer to him? It is not

necessarily a change in the parent (though it may be); it is not necessarily an increase in the parent's love (though, again, it may be). It is an accession of intimacy between the parent and the child. The child may remember a parent's "No" as the most endearing evidence of his love. So, exactly, the simple and natural Prayers of men may and often do bring men to intimate terms with God. I believe that there is a true sense in which our Prayers can be said to change the outward deeds of God in the universe; I believe that our Prayers are necessary for us and for God. But both these convictions I am quite willing for the moment to relinquish. Our unaffected, unreasoned requests to God, spoken in the spirit of childhood, bring us to intimate terms with God; and when we reach such intimacy we find that God is speaking to us, as a man speaks with his friend. He is telling us that He cares, and that He will do what is best. No answer to Prayer could be firmer than that. It is the ample result of a relationship cultivated by free and unrestrained converse through Prayer.

II

When we have prayed with such childlikeness that we feel the Fatherhood of God, then with the same naturalness we add to our tiny requests one all-inclusive petition: we say, "Do, O Father, Thy will for us, and grant us to find our place in it."

At first this seems submission or resignation. And it is submission or resignation; only not submission or resignation in the commonly accepted sense. By submission most men mean one of three things: (1) resignation to fate; (2) resignation to men's carelessness; or (3) resignation to the laws of nature (apart from God's will). Let us glance at these phases of men's definition of submission.

There was in ancient Stoicism a good deal that was resignation to fate. The unity devised for polytheism was fate, to which gods as well as men were thought to be subject. It was a hard necessity lying behind and within the mechanism of the universe. It was not nature and it was not God. It was, as it were, a stone wall which got itself built no one knew how or when; and it seemed the unhappy chance of men, as in the dark, to be con-

stantly bumping their heads against it. It was a stern and brave code which counselled people not to complain when fate abused them; but it was a cheerless sort of resignation. This code is woven into some of the living of our day. It does not know why it should be harassed with pain or bereavement; it sees only the night ahead; but it faces the future, dry-eyed and silent, submitting to its fate. There cannot have been any childlike abandonment of Prayer prefacing such a mood.

Resignation to men's carelessness is a more modern aspect of Stoicism, founded upon a growing sense of our membership one of another. When a steamboat, crowded with humble pleasure-seekers, is burned in the harbour, owing to the criminal carelessness of owners and inspectors, it is not uncommon to hear counsels of submission. Of course, proceeds the plea, the craft should have been condemned and abandoned years ago; but we are in a world where men's relationships are so compact that many must needs suffer for the ignorance, neglect, and cupidity of any one of the members of humanity. In the same way it is not uncommon to hear of people who condone the selfishness or stupidity of

rulers or governments who set angry wars in motion, with all their hideous and atrocious sufferings dealt out to the poor. There is a possible interpretation of this submission to the sins of the few whose effects are visited upon the lives of the many, — an interpretation which touches upon God's fatherhood of all men. But there is also a hard interpretation which leaves God out, and says, "Oh, well; since we are packed thus tightly into the world, we must bear as best we can the tragic consequences which will come now and again." This is very courageous, but it is not the submission which has approached God with the childlike simplicity of Prayer. It is possible that we may find ourselves looking up to God, and in our very submission to Him, refusing to submit to what careless men have done. We may seek the dire punishment of selfish and neglectful ship owners who have caused our poor untold misery; we may savagely determine that rulers and governments which live to make war on the nations shall be cast down from the seats of the mighty, and that the humble and meek shall be exalted. All this may find a place in our submission to a divine order which while not creating such

misery as this, permits a freedom in which men can cause utter wretchedness. In any case we cannot pray as children and accept as a matter of course whatever men's carelessness may accomplish in the world.

Resignation to the laws of nature (apart from God's will) is, in these last decades of scientific illumination, the most modern and approved form of stoical submission. Science declares that as men live so are they paid for the kind of lives they live. The justice of the laws of nature seems startling. But there are grewsome exceptions. The havoc of a cyclone, of a tidal wave, of an earthquake, does not seem just to the sufferers. They cannot honestly see how they, among all the children of men, deserve just that sort of visitation. Whereupon science calmly declares that, if men would only diligently study and observe, they would know that to live in certain neighbourhoods is to subject oneself to a certain kind of risk. One need not live there. If there is advantage in a home in that particular spot, the risk of its disadvantages must be assumed along with the benefit of its advantages. It is all quite fair, quoth science, if the possibility of disaster

is transformed into reality. Therefore science coldly advises its advocates to be resigned to the laws of nature. The difficulty with such advice as this is that not infrequently a hero arises who does not submit to these laws but fights them and thereby gains a mighty victory. When, for example, the French attempted to build a canal at Panama, engineers and labourers were conquered by the fevers brought to them by mosquitoes. For this reason, among other reasons, the huge task was abandoned. When the Americans undertook the building of the Canal, one of the first achievements of the genius who directed the work was the elimination of the dangerous insects which had carried death from man to man not many years before. By this and other means he made the Canal Zone one of the most wholesome regions under the American flag, in spite of its natural, tropical environment. He did not submit to the laws of nature, but either transcended them, or used them to a higher and beneficent end. Thus we cannot discover any inherent virtue in submission to the laws of nature in and for themselves alone. The man who prays, as a child, could not feel that to submit in such a scientific way would be

submission to a heavenly Father to whom he had made known his simple and direct requests.

If then, when we say, "Thy will be done," we do not mean submission to fate, to men's carelessness, nor to the laws of nature, what do we mean? Clearly we must mean that we fall back with confidence upon the will of a personal Being, to whom we may address the personal pronoun "Thy," of whom we may use the personal pronoun "Our." We rest in Him, as children, dazed and frightened, fall back into their parents' arms. For fate we give acknowledgment to His supreme mastery over all men and all things. We see no corner, however dark, where His rule is not absolute. It is not only a rule, but a personal rule; He is there Himself, personally responsible for all that has gone amiss in His intricate universe. There is nothing hard and fixed, but all, however bad, is constantly being changed and being made right. His patience is fused through the whole process; and we cry that the end is not yet. We rest in God, we submit to God, because He is really Lord of all.

Since God is our Father, discovered to us as such by the Prayers which we mingle with the Prayers

of others, we see our wants standing side by side with the wants of others. We check some of our requests as they tremble on our lips, because we are loving children, loving not only God but one another, and we resign our detailed petitions into a more general Prayer, asking God to do for us and for our neighbours what is best for us all. That Prayer is not less childlike because it is more open to a wide vision; for the wider vision is due to greater love; and it is childlike to be generous and to love. So, too, we submit to God's ruling that we be members one of another, seeing its high compensations in fellowship and co-operation, accounting the risk of danger and selfishness not too great a price to pay for the boon of being acknowledged brethren in Christ. We do not submit to our own failures and mistakes; and we do not submit to the failures and mistakes of our brethren. Against those we contend with vigour. But to God the Father of all His children we submit. With cheerfulness we bear our common burdens, fight our common sins, and strive to rise, not merely one by one, but all together, to His will for us.

III

Thus we pass from a submission which might seem to be cringing, unintelligent, and negative, to an eager attempt to rise to our place within God's plan both for our individual lives and for the world. We are, you see, enlarging the definition of submission, so that the term submission is tending to be outgrown.

Think of the individual who has come to loneliness, hardship, and darkness in his life. He then prays (if he has at all learned to pray consciously) as he never prayed before. But when the first agony is past, when he finds that he has some other language than a cry, he brings his sad estate before God, no longer asking for relief, but for the will and the power to use this experience for what it can be used, — for some brighter end than mere good fortune could win. In all literature there is scarcely a more thrilling description of a sublime resignation than the description of Jean Valjean's tragic determination, against every offer of escape, against every natural fear and argument, to declare his identity and free Champmathieu. "I presume," said Jean Valjean,

as he faced the electrified courtroom, after his confession, "I presume that all of you think me worthy of pity. But, before God, when I think what I was on the point of doing, I consider myself worthy of envy." That is an extreme case of a man's doing the hardest and greatest deed a man can be called to do, and resting in God because it is absolutely and eternally right, and nothing else at that moment could be anything but absolutely and eternally wrong. To rise to such sacrifice is not sufficiently described as submission; it is a bold and triumphant entrance into the will of God. Only Prayer can make a man ready for such an act,— the degree of agonising Prayer which Victor Hugo described as he pictured Jean Valjean pacing up and down his narrow room all through the night.

To the rising to God's plan for us as individuals, is added the rising to God's plan for us as a whole, as an interrelated humanity,— for the world. We strain our eyes to catch glimpses of God's vision for humanity. We believe, as we look, that each nation stands for something definite and unique. The Jewish nation, we say, stood for righteousness; Greece stood for beauty; Rome, for law; England

stands for duty; and then, as we study our own problem, we say that America stands for opportunity, the place where each discouraged and downtrodden soul may have a full and glorious chance to be a free and strong man. Then the eye goes farther still, and we think that we see a plan from God whereby all the nations of the world shall be gathered into a federation, all banded together to promote justice, to protect the weak, and to make the strongest serviceable to the neighbouring nations as well as to itself. In other words there is the dazzling plan, shining before humanity, of a world where Christian nations exist as well as Christian individuals, where international relationships are honestly Christian as well as the relationships between two people living on the same street. Finally, there is the vision of a Church made one in Christ, and so made one that its oneness and power can never be made the badge (as once) of lordship and control; but only of complete and humble service to all. Like its divine Head, it shall use its restored life not to exercise dominion but to kneel down and wash the disciples' feet.

To pray is to make oneself ready to receive such

visions for the individual and for the world. To receive them through Prayer is to make not only the individual but the world ready for the realised fact of which the vision is but the pattern. The triumph, which the worldling declares impossible, begins to come as many men open their lives through Prayer to receive it into the flesh and blood of the world. And when all men shall be turned, through conscious Prayer, to the opening of life to the will of God for men everywhere, then that shall happen for which the world has been blindly and dumbly waiting, the kingdom of happiness, the kingdom of goodness, the kingdom of peace, the kingdom of heaven.

IV

What then shall we call the submission, through Prayer, to the will of God? It is more than a rising towards God's plan. Where all words fall short, we may discover only a tentative phrase, which may quickly yield to a better when some one is able to speak it. As such a tentative phrase, translating submission into a positive name, I suggest this,— *the joyful acceptance of the best.*

When, through Prayer, we contemplate the divine will, our spirits rise and expand. A new faith is born in us. We look upon God's will as we pray; and we see that we are able to receive it. That is the first stage. The scoffer (which may have been ourselves) has told us that we could not receive it. We were too imperfect, too weak, too anything and everything. And now we know: we can receive God's will. If we keep on praying, we attain a second stage: we long to receive it. Hard and painful as it looked a moment ago, its beauty and joy are revealed. Its very sorrow and difficulty are reasons for desiring to receive it. We long to receive it. To this second stage, only one more can be added: we do receive it. By Prayer we know our capacity; by Prayer, we attain the desire; by Prayer, we receive into our lives the will of God. We know that His transcendent joy of victory is in us: we are doing, actually doing, His will. And that is not submission so much as it is the joyful acceptance of the best that can be, the eternal will of God for our lives.

The summary of all this process which I have been attempting to describe is shown in Christ's

Prayer in Gethsemane. To that Prayer we must constantly return for inspiration and light. It tells as no treatise and no other life can tell what is Christian Prayer. Christ prayed with the simplicity of a child that the Father would take the cup of suffering away. He asked for the boon which His human flesh craved. As He prayed we may be sure that even He who was with God and in God, God Himself, became more intimately united with the Father. Any man who, at however great a distance, has passed through a supreme experience knows that two visions flash before the eyes of the soul. We ask then whether in that topmost moment of all Prayer, the Lord Christ may not have seen first the vision of what it would mean for the world if He evaded the suffering and escaped to a painless peace,— and then the other vision, the vision by which His Cross was to be the solution and inspiration of every righteous tragedy down the years of history, to cast a light across every hard path, to point every trembling and fearful spirit to the exact right and to give the power of an everlasting victory. If common mortals are given such visions to help them through, when they pray on their nights

of Gethsemane, can we believe that Jesus Christ had less? And if the Father vouchsafed to Him the vision, then I think He said, "Nevertheless not my will but thine be done," not with negative resignation, but with the joyful acceptance of the best that could be for the world and for Him. I think He did what He did with His eyes wide open to the splendour of His awful death. And some way, I know not how, I think that if those Roman soldiers who led Him down the hill after His arrest could have held their torches to His face, they would have seen there such joy as never was written on any face before or since,— the joy of accepting God's best at the moment when, the decision having been made, the will of God was beginning to take its last triumphant mount to the very apex of all endeavour, both human and divine, for the love of man and for the love of God.

Christ's Prayer issued not in submission, but in the glowing resolve to work out the Father's will. He was not crushed and passive, but aggressive and triumphant. His Prayer became a vow to fulfil the Father's answer. And, through His saints and heroes, He is still working this answer into history.

Henceforth all who pray in His Name know that they may not bend to the storm, but must rise with strength to be part of the winds of God, thus to be co-workers with God in His plan for the world.

> "In the vow, 'Thy will be done,'
> Lies all Gethsemane."

Yes; and in it lies the Resurrection Garden; then Olivet with its ascending Christ; and finally that far-off scene in the new Jerusalem, when God shall call all His children to the Marriage Feast of the Lamb. Then will it be found that the Prayers of Christ and of His brethren have, through the Father's gift, ushered in the glory of that bright morning,— the last day of all earthly submission, the first day of the complete co-operation of all humanity with God.

PRAYER RECEIVES GOD

VI

PRAYER RECEIVES GOD

ALL people who have been emphatically men of Prayer and who have left any testimony concerning their lives declare that Prayer is the hardest of hard work. The man who makes no conscious effort to pray supposes that Prayer is a harmless and easy diversion for those who are too weak or too indolent to work. But let such a man try honestly to fix his attention in Prayer for half an hour, to shut the world out, to lose himself in contemplation upon a definite request made to God, and he will quickly discover that never before has he so laboriously toiled. Even the habitual worshipper in church finds extreme difficulty in keeping his attention upon a service of Prayer and Praise lasting little more than an hour. The wandering thoughts must constantly be brought home, or else the effort must be abjectly abandoned. Either pri-

vate Prayer or public Prayer requires of a strong body, a strong mind, a strong heart, all the vitality of a whole personality. The Saviour's sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground, when He prayed in Gethsemane.

Why is it that Prayer, which is so natural to man that it is instinctive, should become thus strenuous? If men give themselves up to Prayer with all their energy what is the utmost result? What is it, deep down through all the depths of their nature, conscious and subconscious, that they are striving to obtain? Is there an object of Prayer so profound that it explains why Prayer, when it is seriously assumed, is the hardest of all undertakings?

I

As we turn the fact of Prayer to catch the light of human experience, it throws back, as a diamond in the sun, constantly new revelations of its nature. One could speak indefinitely of these revelations. But my aim now is to discover if possible the revelation which explains all the rest.

When a man escapes indifference to Prayer and

when he breaks through the crust of formalism which easily and quickly forms over the spirit of his devotions, what is the supreme gift which he receives through his Prayer,— through the Prayer which is thoroughly real, thoroughly hard, thoroughly great? Different answers might be given to such a question.

One answer, commanding wide assent, would certainly be that the supreme outcome of Prayer is to change the world. For does it not so lay hold of the willingness of God to do for us that best deed which we will let Him do for us, that all the lesser laws of the universe so contribute of their force to the end of the higher law which our Prayer has set in motion that these lesser or natural laws seem to be nullified, or, at least, transcended? The orderliness of the universe is not by one jot disturbed, for all is law still; only the free will of God so combines the infinite laws of His creation as to bring, through the receptiveness of our Prayers, a quite new effect. In other words the effectual fervent Prayer of a righteous man availeth much, as St. James declared: Prayer changes the world. It works miracles; and the man who prays sees them being performed by

the finger of God. What result of Prayer, he asks, can be greater than that?

Another answer, compelling enthusiastic approval, is that the supreme result of Prayer is the wonderful difference Prayer makes in the lives,— the characters,— of those who pray. This result can be accepted by the so-called practical folk who will not admit that there is anything supernatural in life anywhere,— the folk who cling to the earth, and who shut their eyes when they see the sky and feel the inrush of a sensation which the earth cannot explain. Whether Prayer changes events or not, of one thing they are sure: it has made beautiful souls out of those who lift their hands in supplication. What would St. Paul have been had he not prayed? And who can imagine a St. Francis without Prayer? The modern saints, too, have been what they were because they prayed,— men of action like John Bright and "Chinese" Gordon, men of thought and emotion like Tennyson and Browning, men of science like Asa Gray and Louis Pasteur. Their faces shone because they talked with God: the quality of their lives was changed by Prayer. Nor do we need to refer to eminent examples: each

person who lives in any neighbourhood, however quiet, however noisy, if he observes and reflects, knows by his own immediate experience that Prayer makes an enormous difference in the life of the man who prays. There need be no theory or explanation: the fact itself is evident. Why need we go farther? asks the discoverer of this notable phenomenon: could anything be better than this?

Another plea is sure to be made by the man who has found in Prayer his confidence and his peace. He will not be aware perhaps that Prayer has changed his character: he may think that its results are only such as he alone can see. But he is quite sure of the results within his own secret living. He will tell how once he was fretted by every untoward circumstance in the day, how he worried over the possible calamities of the morrow, how he lay awake at night chasing phantoms across the darkness, how he dreaded both annihilation and eternity, how he vexed his soul with all the doubts and speculations of human thought,— and now he prays, he talks with the unseen God, and he is at peace. No one who looks into the eyes of such a witness to the power of Prayer can hesitate to ad-

mit that this inner peace is a remarkable result. It explains the change in character which the man's companions and friends note. It explains the difference such a man makes in the course of events in the world, just so far as his influence reaches. But we have not gone quite far enough: we need an explanation which will account for the singular depth and sureness of the peace which has entered the man's heart.

So I come to the result of Prayer which I am convinced includes and explains all other results: Prayer receives God. The Life, the Strength, enters through Prayer, and we look up to find that this Life, this Strength, is not ourselves, but is personal and intimate. It is not a gift from God,—a sacred influence; it is not a messenger from God,—an angel from heaven; it is God Himself.

Two comments must be made at once. The first comment is that in an age when we dwell very rightly upon the assurance of the Divine Immanence, we must remember that it is God's invariable law to regard the sacredness of human personality. The men who seem to have known God most, always bear witness to the strange fact, as it seems to us,

that God never thrusts open the door of man's heart, He always waits for the door to be opened, He always waits to be invited to enter. "Behold I stand at the door and knock," is the report which one of the great saints brought back from his hearing of the Divine Voice. The reticence of deference which we mark in every fine spirit of earth, as man meets man, is certainly a reflection of that perfect respect for all created personalities which the Lord of heaven shows. The paradox of the Immanent God, infinitely near each human soul, and yet standing without, awaiting permission to enter, is beyond our comprehension. But the facts as the most profoundly good and reverent bring them home to us are too plain to be gainsaid. God is in us always, because He is all-pervading; but there is, by His will, within the life of each one of us a secret inner shrine, a holy of holies, which is especially and essentially the personality of each one of us, which is the man himself,— from this God will allow Himself to be excluded; or He will joyfully enter and possess the personality, if He is asked. And the asking is the most earnest and honest Prayer.

The other comment,— never more necessary than

now,— is that this invitation is not easy. People who stand outside the profounder aspects of religion, who behold it or cultivate it as a mere æsthetic emotion, are quite apt to quote such words as these:

> "Earth gets its price for what Earth gives us;
> The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in,
> The priest hath his fee who comes and shrives us,
> We bargain for the graves we lie in;
> At the devil's booth are all things sold,
> Each ounce of dross costs its ounce of gold;
> For a cap and bells our lives we pay,
> Bubbles we earn with a whole soul's tasking:
> 'Tis heaven alone that is given away,
> 'Tis only God may be had for the asking."

That is not true. We do not like the explanations of the Atonement which use commercial terms,— "a ransom," "bought with a price," and the like. But there is a necessary truth in them which we shall learn more and more as our rather soft age enters into the experience of a tragic world-war. God may be had for the asking,— but the asking is the utter giving up of all we have and of all we are. It is all that a "price" is, and so much more that we dare not any longer call it a "price." The saints, so far as they can be induced to talk of these intimate concerns of their spirits, tell first of

God's amazing regard for them — He waits to be asked, ere He enter; and then they tell of God's strict insistence on reverence for His own Personality. The Third Commandment has been ringing in the ears of men all through the centuries, but only the saints have discovered how sternly true it is. Men have been watching the Christ kneel down and wash His disciples' feet, but they have forgotten how He treated the flippant and the conventional and the self-satisfied people of His day who thought themselves religious. He repelled people by telling them how hard it was to be His companions, to share His life: "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." He who spoke God's words reveals to us the awful splendour and difficulty of Prayer. It admits God, it receives God; but it must be that hardest and most genuine thing which can truly be called Prayer.

II

The examples of the hard work of Prayer, which is so thorough that it brings one to a full consciousness of God's presence, abound in human experience, but are, for the most part, too sacred to be told to

any one, much less to be chronicled. Still we may classify to some extent the arduous ways over which such Prayer must pass.

The first way is by mysticism. The mystics may be, in one age, ascetic monks; in another, apparently worldly people using all the good things of the world in a normal manner. But whatever the outward disguise, the mystic is putting himself to school to learn the depth and the mystery of Prayer. He knows that God stands at the door and knocks; he knows that if the door is opened for Him, God will enter. But he also knows that gusts of wind now and again blow the door shut, even in the face of the Most August of guests. These winds may be a hot temper, a too keen devotion to the business of this world, inordinate ambition for fame or power, a love of creature comforts, a selfish absorption in a congenial earthly relationship. The mystic knows that it is woefully hard, when one kneels and closes the eyes, to shut the eyes of imagination, which go staring every whither among the material baubles of the world, and refuse to await the coming of the Light which is manifest in the heart made silent and dark for its coming. The mystics have made for

themselves rules how they shall look into every leaf and stone till they see its oneness with all life, how they shall be absorbed themselves in the onward flowing of all that lives towards some mighty centre and source of life, how, by the most active effort to be receptive and passive, they shall receive God, thus seeing Him, as it were, face to face, feeling the protection of the everlasting arms, tasting the graciousness of the Lord. The expressions which the mystic uses to describe the fusion of his life with God's life are often perplexing because of the wildness of their colour and passion; but no one can read them unmoved in so far as the mystic is transparently genuine, endeavouring to relate as best he can a real experience. As you go over his rules for meditation and contemplation, you know that he works hard to receive God's gift of Himself.

"Meeting is often very hard work," writes a Quaker. "It is indeed, and that is the best of it. The Silence is as far as possible from being a kind of Nirvana. It may be, it should be, peace-full; but it is often a strenuous peace." Speaking of the message which may come through the Silence, the same writer adds, "It may be that some long-

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past travail of our own soul, that we ourselves had almost forgotten, is flashed before us with a vividness and an urgency that cannot be resisted, and that bears fruit at last in unsought words."

But the man who suspects that he never could be a mystic, is not barred from the hard task of admitting God to his life through Prayer. There is the practical man, who never expects to see visions, but who prays that God's will for him may be shown. And when he finds what he believes God's command, he obeys, however hard the obedience may be. Through this obedience, he attains something so close to the mystic's reward that it may not be distinguished from it. "He that willeth to do His will," said Christ, "shall know . . ." Obedience always means a cross, sooner or later. It must have been out of his own experience that George Macdonald described *The Path of Obedience:* —

> "I said, 'Let me walk in the fields;'
> He said, 'Nay, walk in the town;'
> I said, 'There are no flowers there;'
> He said, 'No flowers, but a crown.'
>
> "I said, 'But the sky is black,
> There is nothing but noise and din;'
> But He wept as He sent me back —
> 'There is more,' He said, 'there is sin.'

"I said, 'But the air is thick,
And fogs are veiling the sun;'
He answered, 'Yet hearts are sick,
And souls in the dark undone.'

"I said, 'I shall miss the light,
And friends will miss me, they say;'
He answered me, 'Choose to-night
If I am to miss you or they.'

"I pleaded for time to be given,
He said, 'Is it hard to decide?
It will not seem hard in heaven
To have followed the steps of your Guide.'

"I cast one look at the field,
Then set my face to the town;
He said, 'My child, do you yield?
Will you leave the flowers for the crown?'

"Then into His hand went mine.
And into my heart came He.
And I walk in a light divine
The path I had feared to see."

Verily, Prayer is more than words, more than concentration of thought; it is action, deeds, life. The concentration of attention and aspiration may after all be found to be the hardest phase of Prayer; still it is undoubtedly hard always to act in accordance with one's Prayers. Just here men fail again and again to offer a complete Prayer. Unless there be

this sincerity of life within the praying, the Prayer falls apart and fades into vapour. The man who prays to be honest, and does not strangle the first temptation to cheat, is only playing at Prayer. The man who prays to be generous, and does not straightway untie his purse-strings for some adequate cause, is a hypocrite. The saints, some one has said, hurl their lives after their Prayers. This does not mean that they reduce their Prayers to their ability to do: their Prayers are always greater than their best accomplishment. As they tend to catch up with their Prayers, the Prayers instantly spring to a higher level, and the eternal pursuit continues. Nevertheless, Prayers must be done as well as thought and uttered, and it is amazingly difficult to do approximately as much as we ask. Even in this most elementary stage, Prayer is exceedingly hard work.

There are other paths where the difficulties are encountered before men are conscious that they are seeking God, even that they are praying. But the result shows that they have been subconsciously praying, and the effect of their praying has been to admit to their lives the presence of God. Sometimes this subconscious effort is through friendship, when

a friend cares for the most sacred in one's life so sincerely that he puts his shoulder to the burden, and begins a work which one is forced by very love to take upon oneself. I learned recently of a young engineer who was sent to certain famous mines, where he found himself surrounded by agnostics or open scoffers, among his colleagues. In spite of this his own faith grew stronger. One night on a visit to his home in an Eastern city, he returned at two o'clock to the rooms in his hotel where his mother was waiting for him, since he had promised to return early. He came in very weary, explaining that he had returned early as he had expected, but that he had met at the door one of these friends from the mines; they had sat down in the hall, and the conversation came quickly to the idea of Prayer and of God,—and he could not leave his friend till he had done his utmost to show what his faith in God was to him. Almost immediately after that the pleader who strove to communicate his faith to another died. But among the comforters who came to the mother was the man who had talked that night with her son. "I wanted to tell you," he said, as the light of a glad discovery shone in his face,

"that I owe to your son more than to any other person in the world." There was no need of details: they were all plain. Those two friends had struggled together for a noble end: some way the agnostic was persuaded, by his friend's toil and his own, to try the great experiment. The gropings in darkness through the past were made to count. Nothing was lost. The subconscious Prayer came forth into the trembling of consciousness. He prayed with an openness and an expectation he had never thought possible,— and he found God.

Another subconscious experience in Prayer is in the moment when life is admitted to have gone wrong. The days of misery when the soul has been mutely praying for deliverance merge into the day when the cry becomes audible, and the hard effort below the surface pushes itself into a supreme effort above the surface. It is probable that since the time when Saul of Tarsus had seen the face of Stephen at his trial "as it had been the face of an angel," Saul had been troubled, he knew not why. The vision of the Damascus road was the culmination of a subconscious struggle which only then attained consciousness, and Saul cried, "Who art

thou, Lord?" Saul passed at that moment consciously from the keeping of the Law to the inspiration of a Presence. Then there are rescues from a condition more awful. There is no more vivid scene in the New Testament than the picture presented by the woman caught in great sin, deserted by her accusers, forgiven by the pitying Christ. We cannot help believing that she had been, consciously or subconsciously, praying for deliverance from her evil life. But when she saw the patient face of Jesus, with its love and its belief in her, she prayed, I think as she never had prayed before; so that when Christ said, "Go, and sin no more," she knew that she had the power to be free of her sin,—the power of a Divine Presence. All the horror of mistakes and sins, all the agony as they bite into the flesh and nerve, all these days of dull pain and fearful languor, are part of the hard Prayer which the soul is striving to utter, till at length it can come to consciousness, and cry, "My soul is athirst for God." And God is there to reassure, to comfort, to save, to abide with the penitent for ever.

Still another subconscious experience in Prayer is deep sorrow. Sorrow never leaves the mourner

as it found him. It changes life. Perhaps some people may so far steel themselves against it that they will become stoically bitter, almost unhuman. But the ordinary man who is in the hopelessness of bereavement, reaches out his hands for help. He is pathetically grateful for all human sympathy: the simplest words and acts have a meaning which seem marvellous in his eyes. And though he may never hitherto have thought much about Prayer or about God, he is strenuously breaking down barriers in his life which have been building ever since childhood; he is making an opening towards green fields and open skies in his soul. He does not quite understand; but really he is praying, praying in the hardest and most real way. And if he perseveres, if he does not allow the cheap comforts of a strident world to come in too soon, he will find that the subconscious Prayer breaks over into consciousness, and he cries, "Out of the depths, O Lord, have I cried, . . . and thou hearest me!" One asks if it may not be possible that one reason why such terrible experiences are permitted, is that the soul may enter into the hardness of the great search, through Prayer, and so find the Balm which can make man

bless God that he has been in trouble, because, with that trouble as an incentive he has toiled in Prayer till he has come out into the radiant Presence of God.

This brings us back to the thought of St. Paul, that God's Spirit teaches us to pray. I believe that He is teaching the indifferent, even the scoffing and contemptuous, when they are least expecting any inrush of emotion. Francis Thompson has spoken, in words which never can be forgotten, for all who have either stubbornly or ignorantly tried to evade God's Presence. There comes to all such, if experience goes far enough, the sense that God Himself is toiling in Prayer within the heart of His child.

"I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter.
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated,
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat — and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet. . . .
'Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest me!'"

We enter into the labour of God; and discover, in the highest of all ways, that Prayer which brings us into God's Presence is very hard work.

III

Thus we reach the highest good to which Prayer or any other means of grace can bring us,— the conscious possession of God. To possess God consciously solves all problems. If we have Him in our minds and hearts we are not concerned whether we get the things we have asked for: we know that He is with us and in us, and His strength will be sufficient for us under every emergency. When we have the Gift what can we care about gifts? If we are conscious that we have God, our tears may fall for those who are separated from us in death; but by our very consciousness of possession, the Source of Life makes us aware that in Him we possess also those who seem to have died but who really are alive in God. We have the supreme trust,— because we are in Him and He is in us,— that the best was done which could be done; and the peace which passes knowledge comes down upon us. All earthly possessions may fade away. The worry

will tend to destroy us; but, if we have God consciously for our own, we shall dare to bless Him even for our destitution, because we have only Him, and every shred of our trust must be not in any outward perishing thing, but in Him.

To this possession of God, Prayer may and does bring men. Having Him through Prayer they will more and more give themselves to Prayer, that more and more they may possess Him. Little by little, faster and faster, old things will pass away; a new emphasis, a new sense of values, a new joy will enter men's living. There will be a superb indifference to all the accidents of life, for Life itself will be all in all.

If Prayer can accomplish this, who would not give himself to the great experiment? It will not suffice to make a little space of quiet now and then; it will not suffice to say a form of beautiful words; it will not suffice to stand or kneel in sacred places. All these beginnings of Prayer will help. But Prayer means the utmost of a man's strength. It means all he has, all he is, all he hopes to be: it means his whole heart. It is an absolutely thoroughgoing experiment, this praying. It is the abandon-

ment of the dearest earthly relationship, the most cherished friendship, the ambition hitherto most sacred, if any one of these things holds a barrier, even so slight as a single thread of a spider's web, between the soul of the man who prays and the God to whom Prayer is made. Prayer asks everything; and it gives the All-in-all. It is hard: it is a cross. But it is also easy: it is the crown of life. It is God's Fatherhood acknowledged, God's Friendship accepted, God's Life possessed.

Have you prayed with all your life and love? Then you have found God. In Him you have courage; in Him you have insight; in Him you have joy for yourselves and for all you love; in Him you have eternal life.

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